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Russian Nationalists' Misconceptions of the Turkestan Cotton Industry, 1911

William Cohoon

Introduction

In 1833, the United States and Russia came to terms on what is known as the Commercial and Navigation Treaty of 1832, from here on out referred to as the Treaty of 1832. This became the first trade agreement between the two countries, thanks to which Russia began to import vast amounts of cotton and agricultural equipment. In 1911, the United States abrogated the Treaty of 1832, a result of the Russian policies regarding emigration and the treatment of Jewish Americans in Russia. Subsequently, certain Russian nationalists denounced U.S. as meddling in Imperial Russian affairs, and in a surprising move proposed the dissolution of the agreement should be endorsed by the Duma immediately. Russian nationalists believed that the United States would be negatively affected by the treaty's abrogation, but not the Russian Empire. The nationalists further claimed that Jewish Americans controlled the government of the United States, and President Howard Taft had succumbed to their pressure.

Previous literature on Russian nationalists deals primarily with the nationalist's anti-Semitic stance particularly that of the actual Russian Nationalist Party; however, what historians have not discussed are the economic views of the Russian nationalists, as well as their attempted involvement in international politics. Despite what appears to be only an anti-Semitic stance in its dealings with the United States over the Treaty of 1832, this moment provided the nationalists with an opportunity to propose to the Duma the need for economic independence from the United States, or a Russia for

Russians. This was done through the proposal of annulment of the treaty, and an increased duty on all goods originating in the United States. Yet the Russian textile industry relied heavily on cotton from the United States, and had the nationalists achieved their economic policies of creating a ‘tariff war’ with the United States, the Russian textile industry would have collapsed on the eve of World War I.

The Treaty of 1832 and the Jewish Question

The history of the Treaty of 1832 begins in 1783 when Francis Dana, the United States Ambassador to Russia, believed negotiations on a trade agreement with Imperial Russia would soon begin. Despite his efforts, Dana proved unsuccessful at procuring an arrangement with Russia. Momentum for a commercial treaty did not return until the presidency of John Quincy Adams. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 to 1829, when Russia gained territory from Turkey, a change of heart occurred. This also coincided with Turkey and the United States coming to terms with the fact that, “American merchants should have in Turkey the same treatment as those of the most favored nations.”¹ The American Minister to St. Petersburg John Randolph, in response to the Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, presented a treaty that mirrored the Turkish agreement to the Russian administration. Yet Russia did not come to terms with the United States until James Buchanan was appointed Minister to Russia.²

Buchanan oversaw the arduous process of negotiating with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Nesselrode. The American Minister to Russia further spent his time familiarizing himself with French, a diplomatic language of the time, as well as international law. This endeavor enabled Minister Buchanan to fully comprehend the documentation completed by Minister Randolph who, as

¹ Issac Morris Schottenstein, “The Abrogation of the Treaty of 1832 Between the United States and Russia” (master’s thesis, Ohio State University, 1960), 2.

² Ibid., 1-2.

previously mentioned, negotiated with the Russians. Buchanan recognized the United States would benefit significantly from the proposed treaty, but demonstrated to the representatives of the imperial court the possible advantages for the Empire. The minister indicated to the official of the court the necessity to expand trade in the Russian Empire and of the potential to diversify their industry. In spite of these proposed benefits, Nicholas I rejected the terms of the agreement. Count Nesselrode, a supporter of the treaty, aided Minister Buchanan in altering the disputed points of contention in said treaty. On December 17, 1832, after the modifications to the agreement, Minister Buchanan presented the Commercial and Navigation Treaty to the appropriate diplomats. The following day, surprising Buchanan, Nicholas I, “had signed the order that the treaty should be executed. That afternoon Count Nesselrode and Buchanan met at the Foreign Office and signed the treaty.” The Treaty of 1832 was ratified by Imperial Russia on January 8, 1833, with the United States following suit on April 8, 1833, and finalized with an exchange of ratifications in Washington D.C. on May 11, 1833.³

Of particular interest is the fact that during the course of negotiations of the thirteen articles discussed, only Article I did not receive attention, nor was it emphasized by the imperial court of Russia. Article I fundamentally altered the relationship between the two countries. But why? Due to the significance that the article carries we must consider the following statement verbatim.

There shall be between the territories of the high contracting parties, a reciprocal liberty of commerce and navigation. The inhabitants of the respective States shall, mutually have

³ Ned Herman Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce between the United States and Russia: Influence of a Minority Group on International Affairs” (master’s thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1970), 1-3.

liberty to enter ports, places and rivers of the territories of each party, wherever foreign commerce is permitted. They shall be at liberty to sojourn and reside in all parts whatsoever of said territories, in order to attend to their affairs and they shall enjoy, to that effect, the same security and protection as natives of the country wherein they reside, on condition of their submitting to the laws and ordinances there prevailing and particularly to the regulations in force concerning commerce.⁴

Article I did not have to be invoked until 1865, when Russia began to detain Jewish Americans travelling in the country. In 1864 Bernard Bernstein, a former Jewish Russian who became a citizen of the United States, visited his family in Poland. During his time in Poland, Bernstein was incarcerated by the Russian police “for evading his military obligations.” Subsequently, after much deliberation between the United States Minister and Imperial Russia, Bernstein was released, perhaps only because of his American citizenship.⁵

Further issues soon arose and the tipping point appears to have occurred in mid-1880, when officials in St. Petersburg tried to deport Jewish businessman Henry Pinkos. The United States embassy, upon hearing of the plight of Pinkos, secured an extension for the businessman, but eventually St. Petersburg ordered Pinkos and his family out of the capital. This occurred despite Pinkos not completing his business. Upon boarding, officials requested Pinkos’ passport, however, Pinkos had placed his identification in his checked baggage.

⁴ National Archives United States (NAUS), RG59, Records of the Department of State relating to Political Relations between the United States and Russia (M5144), reel 6, 711.612/56. The author of this document is unknown due to illegible signature/initials, but was written to the Department of State on November 25, 1911.

⁵ Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce,” 10-11.

Unable to provide the appropriate documentation on the spot officials sent Pinkos to prison.⁶ After much deliberation between Russia and the United States, St. Petersburg released Pinkos, and allowed him to return to the United States. The importance of this particular incident is the interpretation of Article I by Secretary of State Evarts, who “established the policy that the privileges accorded by the Treaty applied to all alike without regard to the religious body to which they belonged,” however, the “Russian officials [who] viewed the matter, foreigners of any particular creed had only the same privileges as were enjoyed by Russian subjects of the same creed.”⁷ Imperative to the argument are a couple of points that did not garner the necessary attention by the diplomats of the imperial court and the United States.

Given that the rise of anti-Semitism is much too broad of a subject to discuss, herein we will concern ourselves with the issues that arose between the United States and Imperial Russia. First we should consider laws existing before, and immediately after, the signing of the Treaty of 1832. In 1824, a law stipulated that, “all foreign Jews, regardless of their citizenship, even into places where Russian Jews are admitted, as well as the entry into Russia of Russian Jews who repudiated their country, is prohibited.”⁸ This is of interest when one takes into consideration the ongoing negotiations soon thereafter. Furthermore, “in accordance with Russian Legislation of 1835 and 1839 it will be seen that certain categories of foreign Jews were allowed residence in Russia.”⁹ Yet these matters appear to have gone unnoticed by the United States and the Russian Empire at the time, which more than likely contributed to a rise in tensions between

⁶ Schottenstein, “The Abrogation of the Treaty of 1832 between the United States and Russia,” 8-9.

⁷ Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce,” 24.

⁸ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6, 711.612/78, Dispatch Translation of *Rossiia*, Curtis Guild to the Secretary of State, December 14, 1911, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

the two countries once the issue of Jewish faith became apparent to the United States several decades later.

Hostilities toward the Jewish population grew with the assassination of Alexander II by revolutionaries, of whom one was Jewish, and contributed to an increase of anti-Semitism in the imperial court. Alexander III further exacerbated hostilities due to his anti-Semitic stance, as did his Minister of the Interior Nicolas Ignatiev, who permitted pogroms and initiated legislation against the Jewish population of Russia, thus leading to increased immigration of Jews outside of the empire.¹⁰ The Russian Empire additionally believed that “American Jews are divided into two classes: 1) those who were formerly Russian subjects, and 2) all the others ... if a Russian subject becomes the subject of another country without soliciting the permission of the Russian government, he is (according to Russian law) still considered a Russian subject.”¹¹ The role of the Jewish population in the Revolution of 1905 further increased tensions in the imperial court and in the western border regions of the empire along the borders of, “the Kingdom of Poland where they constituted a large number of organized workingmen.”¹² The Kishinev massacre also further demonstrates the growth of the anti-Semitism.¹³ These conflicts contributed to the rise of discontent of

¹⁰ Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce,” 5.

¹¹ NAUS, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Echoes in the English and American Press*, Russko Slovo. General Consul Snodgrass, in this dispatch 711.612/87, complied and translated twenty eight newspapers.

¹² Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce,” 6-7.

¹³ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6, 711.612/87, “Abrogation of the Treaty of 1832,” Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Russkia Vedomosti*.

Jewish Americans and subsequently led them to encourage the United States government to abrogate the Treaty of 1832.

Yet despite these issues between the Russian Empire and the United States, trade flourished and by 1910 the United States exported more than \$78.5 million worth of merchandise to Imperial Russia. This was largely comprised of \$50 million in cotton and approximately \$11 million in agricultural machinery, whereas the United States imported only \$14.9 million worth of goods from Russia.¹⁴ In spite of the highly successful trade agreement, by 1911 the House of Representatives passed a decree, by a margin of three hundred votes to one, to abrogate the Treaty of 1832.¹⁵ Curtis Guild delivered the decision that the United States had rescinded the treaty to Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei D. Sazanov.¹⁶

Russia for Russians: The Russian Nationalist Party

The response in Imperial Russia was varied. For the purposes of this article the reply of the Russian Nationalists will be explored. First we must begin with the respective origins of the Russian Nationalist Party and its constituency, which profoundly affected their decision-making. With the legalization of political parties, after the Revolution of 1905, a group of noblemen from the western border region of Imperial Russia formed the Russian Nationalist Party in 1909. The landed nobility in the region held the perception that a class-based society greatly threatened their livelihood, “which had always

¹⁴ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Echoes in the English and American Press*, 3.

¹⁵ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *At Last*, “*Novoye Vremia*.”

¹⁶ Rubenstein, “The Abrogation of the 1832 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce,” 1.

justified its dominance in terms of status rather than class.”¹⁷ As the industrial revolution came to Russia the noblemen of the region increased their profits in agriculture. This group recognized that rather than earning meager pay from renting the land to peasants, “owning an estate now meant owning a source of income.”¹⁸ The Russian Nationalist Party’s primary constituency, the gentry, could be found in the western border regions as well, as the area “was highly fertile ... with extensive commercial agriculture,”¹⁹ eventually providing a strong political base.

Originally the constituency of the Russian Nationalist Party supported the autocracy, however, due to the industrialization of the country that threatened the landed nobility’s existence the tsar began to lose the support of party members. Policies enacted by the Minister of Finance Sergei Witte for the development of industry in Russia “disadvantaged the agrarian sector of the economy. All this distanced the nobles from a state that had historically been their protector.”²⁰ Furthermore, these articles of legislation essentially led the noblemen to create a political party that represented their ideology to the tsar and explains why they “feared industrialists and refused to cooperate with them.”²¹ However, it is worth noting that this organization was, “not so much a party of nationalism as a party of the dominant Russian nationality in a multinational empire. They sought to achieve the complete domination by the Russians within the empire.”²²

¹⁷ Robert Edelman, *Gentry Politics on the Eve of the Russian Revolution: The Nationalist Party 1907-1917* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 174.

²² Ibid., 10.

Such a political statement is attributed to their region of origin and constituency, but certainly does not justify the Nationalist Party's anti-Semitic stance. The landed nobility of the Russian Nationalist Party was typically from the western border region of Imperial Russia. The area was historically a Polish territory prior to 1794 where the "Polish nobles dominated landholding[s]." The control the Polish held alienated the Russian noblemen, and exacerbated by the peasantry, where the "Jews had extensive influence over urban commerce."²³ After the failed Polish uprising in 1863, Russian noblemen's precarious living situation improved as a result of the autocratic state. Despite these improvements, the Russian nobility still had "competition on the land from Polish landlords and in the towns from Jewish merchants."²⁴

This perceived threat continued despite the Polish and Jewish populations being minorities in the area. The anti-Semitic stance held by the Russian nobility is only further emphasized by the perception that Jews had participated in the Revolution of 1905 and opposed the tsar. Of particular interest is the Jewish participation in the revolutionary activities in the western border region, "which roughly corresponded to the territory of the Pale Settlement to which Jewish residence was restricted."²⁵ Thus, "the nationalism of the west Russian gentry was the product of their sense of inferiority and fear of non-Russian national groups."²⁶ These beliefs, and the Nationalist Party's desire to only concern themselves with their constituency, led them to voice the concerns of the "Russian landlords," that "raised the demand 'Russia for Russians,' but "the Nationalist Party's principles

²³ Robert Edelman, "The Russian Nationalist Party and the Political Crisis of 1909," *Russian Review* 34, no. 1 (1975): 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

²⁵ Edleman, *Gentry Politics on the Eve of the Russian Revolution*, 50-51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

were nearly always consistent with the most basic pragmatic interests of its constituents.”²⁷ When considering the abovementioned we now should be able to understand the following response by the Russian nationalists to the United States.

According to the Russian nationalists, President Taft’s decision to support Congress on the issue of abrogation originated from the influence that Jewish Americans exerted in the United States government. This response can be attributed to the Russian treatment and policies toward Jewish Americans, as General Consul John H. Snodgrass stated that President Taft personally opposed the abrogation of the Treaty of 1832. Nonetheless, Jewish Americans at this point began to demonstrate against treatment of American Jews in Russia. Such a response is attributed to Russian policies toward people of Jewish ancestry that stated, “No foreign Jews except bankers, heads of important commercial houses, brokers’ representatives, clerks and agents of commercial houses are permitted to enter Russia.”²⁸ This further demonstrates the conflict with Article I of the Treaty of 1832. Furthermore, in the eyes of Russian nationalists such a verdict was due to “the congressmen” who intended to “influence Russia’s domestic laws by threatening to abrogate the treaty,”²⁹ as “they [Jews] are strong on two positions, financial and political.”³⁰ Russian nationalists charged that President Taft succumbed to “the public opinion of the Jewish population,

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6, 711.612/56, “Construction of Article I of Treaty of 1832 with Russia,” the initials of author are illegible, but appear to be JHP to the Secretary of State, November 25, 1911.

²⁹ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogation of the Treaty of 1832,” Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911; At Last, “Novoye Vremia.”

³⁰ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, Messrs. Sulzer & Co., “Novoye Vremia.”

which represents a very considerable and well united number of electors...”³¹ The nationalists stated the presidential candidates were placating the Jewish population, as the United States at this time was preparing for the presidential election of 1912.

Additionally, the nationalists professed that Jewish Americans, whom they saw as mostly former Russian subjects, had “the pretended purpose ... to give the American Jews the right to come to Russia without any restrictions...”³² Ultimately, the nationalists’ support of legislation and laws that restricted the travels of Jews revolved around their belief that “during the time of the Revolution many Jews – socialists, anarchists, and revolutionists emigrated to America.”³³ Such a belief can be attributed to increased anti-Semitism after the assassination of Alexander II. Thus, the nationalists believed Jewish émigrés constituted a monumental threat to the stability of Imperial Russia. Yet this provided an opportunity for the Russian nationalists to propose their own legislation aimed at reducing the United States’ importance in Russia. The Russian nationalists advised the Duma to support the abrogation of the Treaty of 1832. The nationalists declared in the newspaper *Novoe Vremia*, “instead of the low duty, a higher duty will be charged on American goods. The further growth of American trade in Russia will be impossible; American goods will be displaced by England and Germany.”³⁴

³¹ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Echoes in the English and American Press*, “Russkoe Slovo.”

³² NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, Messrs. Sulzer & Co., “*Novoye Vremia*.”

³³ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Question About American Jews*, “*Russkoye Slovo*.”

Russian nationalists recognized the broad economic influence of the United States in Russia. This led the nationalists to seek greater economic freedom from the United States, particularly in the cotton industry. At this time, Russia imported over 50 percent of its cotton, of which up to 90 percent came from the North American republic.³⁵ To dissuade the United States from exporting goods to Russia, and for the Russian textile industry to not import cotton, the Nationalists formally proposed a piece of legislation that would increase the duties on American imported goods by 100 percent.³⁶ The Russian nationalists believed that Russian Turkestan in Central Asia could provide the empire with the necessary supplies of cotton to maintain the Russian textile industry. According to sources reported from the *Golos Moskvi* the increase in cotton yields in Turkestan could “release” not only Russia but also “the European cotton industry from the American yoke.”³⁷ From 1905 to 1909, exports to the United States amounted to roughly \$18,693,500 while Russia imported \$177,047,000 worth of goods. The Nationalists believed that the

³⁴ NAUS, M5144, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, At last, “Novoye Vremia.”

³⁵ NAUS, M5144, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, Imperial Russia at this point imported 10 million poods (a pood is equivalent to 36.1127 pounds) of American cotton, which is indicated in the article *A Hasty Bill*. Russia’s textile industry required 23 million poods and is discussed at length in *Shooting at One’s People*. The figure of 90 percent is derived from the United States exporting 10 million poods out of the 11.5 million Russia purportedly imported. Although one must additionally consider figures in other newspapers in Russia that state this range is from 8 to 10 million poods a year.

³⁶ NAUS, M5114, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *A Hasty Bill*, “Commersant.”

³⁷ NAUS, M5114, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, Russian-American Trade, “Golos Moskvi.”

United States would be the only negatively impacted party by the nullification of the trade agreement, and it is not surprising that they expressed such a sentiment, leading them to state that “the farmers of the Great American Republic will be the first to feel all the consequences of the political mistake of their representatives.”³⁸ The Nationalists sought to counterattack the United States Congress by enforcing a sort of Russian economic sanction on the United States; more or less a tariff war.

Despite this view, more cautious papers doubted the ability of Turkestan to support the growing demand of the empire and stated the Russian economy would falter greatly if the United States abolished the contract. At this time the Russian textile industry necessitated roughly 23 million poods of cotton to sustain production, and it was estimated that the Turkestan cotton industry would not exceed more than 10 to 13 million poods per year. Approximately 2,736 Russian factories needed cotton, and employed close to 840,520 people, roughly 43 percent of the entire workforce in Russia. *Utro Rossii* stated that with the substantial increase of duty the cost of cotton could hinder productivity, and if Russia did not import cotton from the United States then it was surmised at least half of the textile workers might become unemployed. This, in the opinion of the paper, “cannot be considered anything else but a shot at one’s own people.”³⁹ The newspapers in Moscow and St. Petersburg detailed the monumental increase of cotton production in Central Asia and Turkestan. However, harvests did not approach the levels to support the country as the nationalists hoped for, despite the development of the cotton industry in Turkestan. They did not take into consideration

³⁸ NAUS, M5114, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, Golos Moskv, “Russian-American Trade.”

³⁹ NAUS, M5114, RG59, reel 6 711.612/87, “Abrogations of the Treaty of 1832,” General Consul John H. Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911, *Utro Rossii*, “Shooting At One’s Own People.”

the impact and the subsequent response by the people of Turkestan to the modernization efforts in the region.

Modernization of the Cotton Industry in Turkestan

According to John Whitman cotton cultivation in Turkestan dates to the time before the birth of Christ. To grow cotton in Central Asia can be considered a time-consuming and laborious process, and as a result the cultivation requirements revolved around the domestic needs. Not until the eighteenth century did “trade relations, albeit on a low level, were established with Russia on a fairly regular basis.”⁴⁰ Yet Turkestan cotton did not appeal to the Russians because of its high costs and low quality. To manufacture cotton the native inhabitants, who held small family parcels of between two and two and a half *desiatinas* (one *desiatina* equals 2.7 acres), cultivated the land through traditional methods that “were primitive to an extreme degree.”⁴¹ For instance, to till the soil farmers relied upon “an ancient native implement which did not turn, but only loosened the soil ... since the cotton plant requires depth, three such plowings were necessary.”⁴²

Furthermore, the “native varieties were of short staple and their bolls opened only partially, so the bolls were broken off the stem in harvesting.”⁴³ These production procedures contributed to a period of almost two to three months to harvest one *desiatina*, plus the transportation time from Tashkent to the Orenburg railhead amounted to five to six months. Upon delivery it was not uncommon to see a 35 percent loss of cotton.⁴⁴ Thus, to meet the needs of the textile industry Russia relied on cotton from abroad, almost exclusively from the

⁴⁰ John Whitman, “Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 15, no. 2 (1956): 190.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

United States. During the American Civil War cotton exports were severely limited and, “the growing importance of trade with Asia,” coupled with this shortage of cotton from the United States “were major factors leading to the Russian conquest of Turkestan in the 1860s.”⁴⁵

The Russian occupation of Turkestan did not begin extensively until the military campaign of 1863. Imperial Russia’s desire to expand into Central Asia originated from a belief for a need to “access markets, as well as support in any potential contest with Great Britain.”⁴⁶ The loss in the Crimean War had damaged Russian prestige abroad and military leaders believed that the conquest of Central Asia could perhaps alter such a perception. However, there was not a coherent plan by the imperial court, as most wished to avoid a conflict with the British. Yet strong-willed military leaders pressed on in Central Asia and by 1866 Alexander II “signed an official decree of annexation.”⁴⁷ General Konstantin Petrovich fon Kaufman was appointed governor of the region, and arrived in Tashkent in 1867. Kaufman “envisioned the city as the embodiment of a new civilization,” and further, “believed ... Russian [influence] ... would transform Turkestan into a productive and progressive tsarist province.”⁴⁸ Subsequently, Governor-General Kaufman developed a plan to increase the cotton yields in Turkestan.

In the early 1870s the governor ordered two experts on cotton to the United States to study the various varieties in use in order to find a more suitable seed for Turkestan. Upon their return, the specialists provided two options of cotton strains: Sea Island and Upland. Further efforts with the Sea Island variety proved that this strain could not be

⁴⁵ David Pretty, “The Cotton Industry in Russia and the Soviet Union,” *National overview and the USSR, Textile conference IISH*, Nov. 11-13, 2004, 13.

⁴⁶ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

used in the region, due to the aridity of Central Asia. Using the Upland class, the Russian Imperial court created posts that specialized in growing seedlings to be delivered to cultivators in the area. What became known as the Emperor's Plantation, located in Merv, established itself as the eminent farmstead in the region. Here local inhabitants could purchase, or rent, agricultural equipment and learn new techniques in native dialects or Russian. The plantation provided seedlings at an affordable cost to agriculturalists. As a result, by 1884 close to three hundred desiatinas grew the American strain, and by 1889 44,500, "or 52 percent of the total sown area."⁴⁹ The native strain was essentially nonexistent by the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁰

According to Imperial Russia the expansion of the cotton harvest in the region was attributed to "the extremely favourable economic conditions, the Russian government having helped its cultivation both by the imposition of a high tariff on imported cotton and by the reduction of the land tax."⁵¹ To further stimulate the cultivation of cotton in Turkestan, in 1900, Russia offered tax incentives. Typically tax on a property was 10 percent of the "expected" harvest. However, if one cultivated cotton the tax on the speculated yield was lower. This occurred despite the fact that grains generally "produced 4-5 times as much income."⁵² This tax incentive was applicable only to those who grew the American strain of cotton.⁵³

The Russian Empire advanced modernization in the area through the construction of railroads, the Trans-Caspian and Orenburg Railways. In 1896, the Trans-Caspian Railroad connected with

⁴⁹ Whitman, "Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia," 194.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 194-195.

⁵¹ Nikolay Ivanovich Malahowski, "Russian Turkestan and Its Products," *Journal of Finance and Trade and Industry Gazette* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 5.

⁵² Whitman, "Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia," 199.

⁵³ Ibid.

Tashkent, which aided in increasing the sown area of cotton in the region. From 1898 to 1900, it is estimated that land under cultivation increased by 54 percent. Similarly, upon completion of the Orenburg section, the region experienced growth from between 200 thousand desiatinas to 423 thousand before the outbreak of World War I.⁵⁴ In the early 1850s Turkestan supplied Russia with close to 52 thousand poods of cotton, less than 5 percent of all imports; however, exports slightly surpassed 14 million poods in 1915 with a total 524 thousand sown desiatinas.⁵⁵ This total was the highest yield the area experienced, and would not be attained again until the 1920s. These events contributed to the unprecedented yields that Russian nationalists believed would sustain the Russian textile industry and permit economic independence from the United States. Turkestan, however, experienced many issues that hindered the ability of Russia to maximize the region's capabilities to its fullest potential in order to produce affordably priced cotton for industrialists.

The Reality of Modernization Efforts in Turkestan

This examination of the Russian effort to modernize Turkestan reveals what may be seen by Western scholars as an ambiguous approach to implement consistent reforms to develop the region. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note the difficulties encountered by Imperial Russia while modernizing the territory. Central Asia's climate must first be considered when focusing on the issues that contributed to inefficient means of production. According to the Imperial Russian research, "at this time Turkestan enjoys a far greater number of cloudless days than any other part of the Empire and in that respect resembles that of Cairo," although, it is further noted, "the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 192 and 203.

rainfall, however, being insufficient, artificial irrigation is used.”⁵⁶ Irrigation of Turkestan proved to be a complicated endeavor for Imperial Russia. Several accounts throughout the development of the region attest to the dryness and the lack of water sources in the region, or comment on the ineffective measures implemented for the construction of canals. During his trip in the 1870s, Eugene Schuyler had this to say about a project in the area: “There is a project at Tashkent to irrigate this steppe by the construction of a large canal from the Syr Darya above Hodjent ... still no careful survey has been made, and it is declared by many that such a canal is impossible, and that all money spent before as survey is made is simply thrown away. The work on the canal has, however, already begun.”⁵⁷ Schuyler also described the area as “a parched and barren waste, although at one or two places there are wells and cisterns of brackish and unpleasant water.”⁵⁸

General Kaufman attempted to address the issue of expanding the canals of Turkestan by requesting a geographical survey of the Golodnaya Steppe in 1869. In 1870, Baron Aminov reported, “the Golodnaya Steppe sloped toward the Syr Darya and the Aral Sea and suggested that the Zaravshan River would be more suitable...However, the Zaravshan...lacked volume and uniformity of flow, and the planners had little choice but to proceed with the irrigation of the Golodnaya Steppe by bringing water from the Syr Darya.”⁵⁹ Subsequently, a military engineer presented a design to irrigate 200,000 desiatinas, where construction of the waterway began in

⁵⁶ Malahowski, *Russian Turkestan and Its Products*, 3.

⁵⁷ Eugene Schuyler and VV Grigor'ev, *Turkistan: notes of a journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara and Kuldja*, vol. II, (Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1877), 227.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ian Mately, “The Golodnaya Steppe: A Russian Irrigation Venture in Central Asia,” *Geographical Review* 60, no. 3 (1970): 333.

1872, but was abandoned by 1879. Construction of the channels can at best be described as tedious and laborious. Russian officials forced unpaid native rural laborers to build the canals, thus alienating the populace of the region, who named the project “Tonghiz Ariq, or pig canal ... The worst possible insult from a Muslim.”⁶⁰ Future attempts to irrigate the region met similar with failures due to the high cost of construction, inability to purchase land from the native population, horrible working conditions that alienated the labor force, and ineffective machinery. All of which contributed greatly to the inefficiency of development. Foreign investors made offers to aid Imperial Russia; however officials declined the proposals.⁶¹

During the construction of the canals, Russian officials forced the inhabitants to work without pay and in poor working conditions, thus eliciting a negative reaction. Not only did the undesirable environment contribute to an unwilling labor unit, but representatives of the imperial court could not implement an educational plan to demonstrate new techniques in irrigation to the workforce. Count K.K. Pahlen, during his tenure in the region as the head of the Senatorial Investigation of Turkestan, noted the following: “I examined many plans for terracing the fields, for improved drainage and water conservation, but all would have necessitated a prolonged period for the reeducation of the population and the abandonment of old established technique, while the novel methods introduced by the Russian engineers had so far yielded very meager results.”⁶² Additionally, Count Pahlen stated that the lack of a proper university in Russia at the time where one may learn horticulture contributed to the ineffective training. This resulted in many “former railway and mining engineers who had learnt science or irrigation *in situ*, or, at

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 332-337.

⁶² Count K.K. Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan Being the Memoirs of Count K.K. Pahlen, 1908-1909* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 92.

best, men with a technical education at a secondary school level” becoming engineers of the irrigation projects. The Count added, “under these conditions mistakes and failures were unavoidable.”⁶³

Administrative difficulties included an oversight of the seedling plantations set up to aid the expansion of the American strain of cotton at a low cost. Although relatively successful due to the affordable cost of the seedlings, the farmsteads set up to sell, and or rent agricultural machinery proved to be a failure. Russian officials did not take into consideration the poverty of the Turkestan population. In addition to this the Russian administrators did not understand the traditional landholdings of the peasants. Many of the people who held land possessed small parcels, and for those who had larger estates they typically used the property for animal husbandry. This severely limited the incorporation of modern equipment to improve the process of cultivation and rendered the equipment of little value its owners. The shortage of Russian agricultural specialists in the region provided by the Agriculture Department exacerbated the situation. For example, in 1911 there were only three or four such professionals that resided in Turkestan, all of whom did not specialize in cotton.⁶⁴

The oversight of land rights proved to be problematic. For instance, “in 1873 local Russian officials worked out a measure, and soon thereafter secured its application, transferring title to all Turkestan lands to the Russian state.”⁶⁵ Officials believed had they not pursued such a course with the indigenous people, Imperial Russia would have appeared weak, and had the natives retained their property they would more than likely have refused to sell the land to the Russians. However, this was designed “to break up the power of

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Whitman, “Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia,” 195-196.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 196.

the local aristocracy and the secular strength of the Moslem clergy.”⁶⁶ Ultimately this movement wound down, but the misstep proved that officials did not understand that the “Turkestan peasant had a different attitude toward his land than his Russian counterpart.”⁶⁷ The peasants of Turkestan invested significant amounts of labor to maintain their parcel, and as a result of owning only several desiatinas the family often invested their efforts into cultivating crops that reaped a larger profit, thus creating a stronger bond with their property.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, not only did Russian officials not comprehend the magnitude of native affinity for their land, but business ventures in the region sought to exploit this economically, as well.

Count Pahlen’s seminal piece on his tenure investigating the corruption in Russian Turkestan provides a valuable first person account of such dealings by the private sector in the region. Pahlen noted many creditors offered to purchase cotton and corn from the local agriculturalists, and he further detailed how this contributed to the widespread cultivation of the crop.⁶⁹ John Whitman provides greater detail about the consequences in such matters. Creditors exploited the recent Russian policy of permitting private industry in the region. Here the firms, “organized staffs of agents to buy cotton against future delivery with cash advances to the peasants.”⁷⁰ Naturally, farmers in Turkestan agreed to such an endeavor as they used more of their land for the cultivation of cotton as a result of the price paid for the strain of cotton from the United States. Farmers did so despite an interest rate that often approached 60 percent.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 197.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 196-197.

⁶⁹ Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan Being the Memoirs of Count K.K. Pahlen, 1908-1909*, 101.

⁷⁰ Whitman, “Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia,” 199.

⁷¹ Ibid., 200.

Agrarians put their parcel of land up as the collateral for the advance and frequently defaulted when they did not generate a high enough yield at harvest time. Furthermore, with the modernization of ginning, working with a plethora of natives became cumbersome and caused firms to deal less frequently with native farmers. These factors contributed to “200,000 landless agricultural workers.”⁷² Eventually, this led Count Pahlen to explicitly explain the potential threat this had to the overall livelihood of Turkestan, as many farmers stopped producing grains in order to earn more money through creditors. By this point Pahlen stated, “There arose a shortage of corn, and subsequently of bread, which in this region had been ridiculously cheap ... At about this time, too, the banks ceased to be interested in cotton as before...”⁷³ Exacerbating the discontent amongst the populace is additionally seen with the introduction of the railroad, as, “in a word the construction of the railway means the absolute and final russification of the middle zone of Central Asia.”⁷⁴ Contributing further to the discontent of the people of Turkestan was the construction of the railway.

Officials of the imperial court, and in particular General Kaufman, believed the railway would “transform Turkestan into a productive and progressive tsarist province”⁷⁵ which it undeniably did, but at what cost? First and foremost, the railway created and reinforced an imperial identity. For instance, to commemorate the opening of the railroad stations along the route of the Trans-Caspian, officials of the Russian Empire played “military music,” consequently in response to this: “Turkoman women and children began to raise loud cries of lamentation, while the men threw themselves on the

⁷² Ibid., 200.

⁷³ Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan Being the Memoirs of Count K.K. Pahlen, 1908-1909*, 101.

⁷⁴ G. Curzon, “The Transcaspian Railway,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 11, no. 5 (1889): 291.

⁷⁵ Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, 32.

ground with their foreheads in the dust.”⁷⁶ The memory of the loss to Russia proved too much to bear for the native inhabitants of the region. To build the Trans-Caspian and Orenburg Railroads, cheap Central Asian labor became the norm. Yet a fear arose that too many local natives employed to construct the railway would be dangerous, so the Imperial Russia employed a vast amount of Russian labor that, in turn, replaced the locals. By the time of completion of the Orenburg section there were 5,094 employed Russians, and only 948 natives. Additional issues occurred as a result of wage differences, as the locals received a fraction of what Russian garnered. Both sides frequently did not receive their wages. This led to confrontations between the two groups and incited the growth of the Turkestan intelligentsia, who, after the 1905 Revolution, began to use the press to advance the ideas of nationalism amongst the native populace and the discrepancies between them.⁷⁷

Although Turkestan experienced strikes prior to 1905, after the revolution protests occurred more frequently. This can be attributed, once again, to the railway. The Russian Empire permitted strikes after the 1905 Revolution and one can see a significant growth in protest to less than satisfactory work conditions. Beginning in 1895 and until the revolution, “there had been 270 strikes at cotton factories with 197,139 participants who left work for a total of 945,686 worker hours.” Consequently, “in 1905, just in the cotton textile industry, there were 1,008 strikes, 784,058 strikers, and 8,329,352 worker hours lost.”⁷⁸ The numbers rose once again by 1912 when, “one hundred thirty-five thousand cotton workers would go on strike ...

⁷⁶ Curzon, “The Transcaspian Railway,” 284.

⁷⁷ Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, 121. To fully grasp the magnitude of the situation that the Trans-Caspian and Orenburg Railway contributed to the problems in the city one should consider the chapter entitled Migration, Class, and Colonialism as well as The Predicaments of “Progress,” 1905-1914.

⁷⁸ Pretty, “The Cotton Industry in Russia and the Soviet Union,” 28.

followed by 180 thousand in 1913; during the first half of 1914, 233 thousand cotton workers struck for a total of over two million worker hours lost, a greater total in six months than in any year except 1905.”⁷⁹ These measures for the modernization of Central Asia undoubtedly contributed to the growth of self-awareness in the inhabitants of Turkestan, and surely influenced the ability to harvest cotton. In spite of the monumental growth of the Turkestan cotton industry, “Central Asian cotton was [still] 50 percent more expensive in Moscow in 1913 than American cotton on sale in St. Petersburg.”⁸⁰

Conclusion: The Russian Nationalists’ Miscalculation

When taking into consideration the events that occurred in Turkestan from the 1870s until the 1890s the region’s significant growth in cotton production is impressive. However, these procedures hindered the ability to maximize the harvest in the area and ultimately the rise in production perhaps had more to do with the total sown area for cotton. For instance, it was noted that the total cultivated area of Turkestan far surpassed the sown area of the United States. Perhaps the Russian nationalists focused on the production of 1907 where the region produced slightly over 9 million poods. This is a remarkable increase from the 1899 figure of 2.2 million poods.⁸¹ What may have contributed to the beliefs of the Russian Nationalist Party is that in 1909, the year the party formed, Turkestan had 300,000 desiatinas⁸² under cultivation that yielded almost 11 million poods. By 1911 the region had 377,000 desiatinas dedicated to cotton; this produced just over 13 million poods, which constituted close to 50 percent of the Russian textile industry’s needs.⁸³ However, at its peak in 1915

⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁸¹ Malahowski, “Russian Turkestan and Its Products,” 2-5.

⁸² Whitman, *Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia*, 198.

⁸³ Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia 1867-1917* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 166.

Turkestan produced 14 million poods of cotton on 524,000 desiatinas, of the necessary 23 million needed to sustain the textile industry.⁸⁴ The increase in cotton yields also coincides with the rise in sown area. Thus, it demonstrates that the growth of the harvest relied significantly on the expansion of cultivated land.

This increase in production, and in sown area, surely contributed to the nationalists' declaration that "the production of cotton in Turkestan is increasing and has reached such dimensions that Russia will not be in need of American cotton in the very near future."⁸⁵ The Russian nationalists must not have taken into consideration the impact of events of the late nineteenth century on the people of Central Asia, nor the approach at implementing policy to maximize the potential of the region. Nevertheless, production never approached the amount the Russian nationalists needed to create a 'Russia for Russians' and economic independence. Additionally, the Russian nationalist desire for economic self-sufficiency and confrontation with the United States appears to conflict with the idea proposed by Robert Edelman, who stated, "the Nationalists were not especially concerned with deflecting attention from internal antagonisms by focusing on external enemies," and "the Russian Nationalist Party approached international politics with surprising confusion and silence."⁸⁶

Yet further studies are warranted on their involvement in the attempt to gain financial autonomy from the United States and their involvement in international dealings. Additional work must also address the view of where Turkestan stood in the grand scheme of a

⁸⁴ Whitman, *Turkestan Cotton in Imperial Russia*, 203. It was estimated in the article "Shooting at One's Own People," from 1911, that 23 million poods were required, but the amount in 1915 may have increased.

⁸⁵ NAUS, RG59, M5144, reel 6, 711.612/87, "Abrogation of the Treaty of 1832," Snodgrass to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1911; Among the Different Newspapers, "Russkoye Slovo."

⁸⁶ Edleman, *Gentry Politics on the Eve of the Russian Revolution: The Nationalist Party 1907-1917*, 193-196.

Russia for Russians, particularly when one considers the nationalists' perceptions of the financial wellbeing of Jews in the western borderlands and that the noblemen were agriculturalists. Was the region to be incorporated as a part of the empire, or to be considered an autonomous region that fed the Russian textile industry? The answers to such questions will only aid the scholarship of the Russian nationalists and their wish of economic liberation from the United States.

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